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SUBJECT: CHP'S CHOICE A STRANGE ONE IN UPCOMING TEKIRDAG
ELECTIONS

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[1](#)1. Summary. In the past five years Tekirdag Province has seen two relatively close elections, with Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its Republican People's Party (CHP) each having won one. While the province would thus seem to be in play, for the upcoming local mayoral election, CHP has chosen Adem Dalgic, an unknown and inexperienced medical doctor, to run against Ahmet Aygun, the current AKP Mayor of Greater Tekirdag Municipality. As with other cities in the regions surrounding Istanbul, AKP's better organization, greater financial resources and history of competent delivery of public services are likely to outweigh in voters' minds the global economic crisis and dogged accusations of corruption. End summary.
Tekirdag Relatively Unscathed By The Economic Crisis, So Far

[1](#)2. Tekirdag Province is located on the Sea of Marmara, 80 miles west of Istanbul. According to Governor Aydin Nezhir Dogan (nominally unaffiliated, but widely assumed to be close to the AKP), Tekirdag has the seventh largest economy in Turkey, with 1,300 industrial companies, 170,000 registered workers and 425,000 hectares of agricultural land. While of relatively small size (the municipality has a population of 134,000 and the province 770,000), the province has big plans to leverage its location and transform itself into a regional logistics hub: The two existing seaports are being expanded, and a third port, with a capacity of 2.5 million metric tons per year, is under construction, with local financing. In addition, an international airport has recently opened, and this summer a trans-European railway line will be completed. All of these steps are being taken in anticipation of a GOT initiative to move to Tekirdag some of the logistics and shipping business currently handled in Istanbul.

[1](#)3. Dogan says that Tekirdag's economy is doing relatively better than those of Bursa or Kocaeli (Refs) because it is based on textiles, white goods and agriculture, which sectors have not been as hard hit as the automobile sector upon which the Bursa and Kocaeli economies are based. (He cautioned, however, that textiles have withstood the crisis in part because of forward orders placed before the crisis, and that in the future orders will probably decline.) Beginning in December, Tekirdag began experiencing some layoffs, but its current (official) unemployment level is at a relatively-low eight percent. Dogan thus concludes that the crisis will have but a small effect on the local elections.

[1](#)4. At our meeting with the local chamber of commerce,

members were a bit more pessimistic than was Governor Dogan. Most have seen a decline in business. Even food wholesalers -- generally considered impervious to recession -- complained that while sales have remained firm, customers are paying very slowly. However, a survey engineer, who is involved in construction projects at the planning stage, said that he has not suffered a drop-off in business -- perhaps a leading indicator that, long-term, Turkish businesses remain optimistic.

CHP Opts for an Unknown

15. In the 2004 local elections, AKP won 33 percent of the votes and CHP 25 percent. In the 2007 general elections, CHP came out ahead, 34 percent to 29 percent. With such a history, Tekirdag would thus appear to be in play, and deserving of substantial effort and attention by CHP. Yet, it has chosen as its candidate Adem Dalgic, a 48 year old unknown state hospital surgeon apparently without any prior political experience. In local elections, where the personalities of the candidates are as important as their party affiliations, Dalgic would appear to be a strange choice. While we were eager to discuss this with the CHP local party leadership and candidate, they refused to meet with us, claiming that to do so would be an "interference" in the election.

Democratic Party Mini-Revival

16. Unlike CHP, the Democratic Party (DP) leadership and

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candidate Ercan Tursucular were happy to meet with us -- and invited some two dozen ordinary party members to participate, as well. Tursucular is an attorney in his 60s, and a founding member of the one-time ruling ANAP party. As in Kocaeli (Ref B), DP in Tekirdag is focused on reviving the party's brand. Tursucular's message to us and the party faithful was that AKP must be defeated because it is compromising Turkey's secular democracy and introducing an "Arab culture and mentality." (Comment: Such a message is unlikely to attract voters who lean towards AKP, but it could well pull votes from CHP.)

AKP, As Usual, In The Catbird Seat

17. Confident and outgoing, Tekirdag mayor Ahmet Aygun, a 20-year veteran of local politics, was effusive in hosting us. He said that local voters would judge the candidates based on three main criteria: Previous performance, future capacity, and the overall political climate in the country. As proof of his own competencies, Aygun pointed to two huge charts on the wall of his office: The first listed the status of 36 promises made by him in the last campaign -- 32 of which were marked completed. The second chart showed 60 more projects that, while not part of his campaign platform, he had nevertheless completed. Aygun has put together a list of 30 more promises that will form his platform for the coming campaign. Aygun said he highly values accountability, and noted that every month he distributes a publication updating the status of his promises. According to Aygun recent polls show AKP support around 40 percent and CHP in the 30s.

Comment

18. The recent shaky performance of CHP's leadership has begun to cause media commentators to question just how serious its leadership is about contesting the local elections. The approach taken by CHP in Tekirdag will do nothing to reassure people that it does indeed intend to mount a meaningful challenge to AKP. In a district that should be in play, CHP's choice of an inexperienced and

unknown candidate is hard to understand.
Wiener